

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KUALA 05099 040334Z

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SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEE BOAT CASES: ETHNIC CHINESE?

REF: STATE 216116 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. WE WOULD ESTIMATE THAT MORE THAN HALF OF THE BOAT

CASE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN MALAYSIA ARE ETHNICALLY CHINESE.

MALAYSIA POLICY ON ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES, I.E. TO REFUSE ENTRY

FOR ALL NON-MUSLIMS, WAS DEVELOPED IN PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

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FALL OF SAIGON WHEN MOST REFUGEES WERE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE,

THEREFORE, WHILE IT MIGHT BE CITED BY MALAYSIAN GOVT
OFFICIALS AS AN EXCUSE FOR PUSHING OFF BOAT CASES, IT IS
NOT THE MAIN REASON FOR THE GOM'S POSITION. END SUMMARY.

2. PROVIDING STATISTICS ON THE ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF BOAT
CASE REFUGEES POSES DIFFICULTIES, NOT LEAST OF WHICH IS
DEFINITION OF A CHINESE IN VIETNAM. IN OUR EXPRIENCE,
REFUGEES INTERVIEWED BY CHINESE-SPEAKING OFFICERS WHO USE
SOME MANDARIN IN THE INTERVIEW ARE MORE LIKELY THAN OTHERWISE
TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY, TOO, SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OR HAVE
ATTENDED CHINESE SCHOOLS. WE WOULD ESTIMATE THAT MORE THAN
HALF OF THE BOAT CASE VIETNAMESE WE HAVE INTERVIEWED COULD BE
CLASSIFIED AS CHINESE BY VIRTUE OF THE LANGUAGES THEY SPEAK OR
THE SCHOOLS THEY HAVE ATTENDED.

3. THE ORIGINAL WAVE OF REFUGEES AFTER FALL OF SAIGON APPEARED
TO INCLUDE A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC VIETNAMESE. ONE CAN
SPECULATE THAT THE PRESENT SHIFT IN FAVOR OF ETHNIC CHINESE
IS EXPLAINABLE IN TERMS OF THE CHNIESE MERCHANT ROLE IN VIETNAM
AND THE NEED TO HAVE FUNDS TO OBTAIN A BOAT TO ESCAPE.
FARMERS AND EX-SOLDIERS ARE NOT LIKELY TO HAVE THE NECESSARY
CAPITAL (ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN A GOOD NJMBER OF NUNG GUARDS
AMONG MALAYSIA'S BOAT CASE REFUGEES). IT APPEARS THAT A
NUMBER OF CHINESE REMAINED BEHIND AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON
TO SEE HOW THEY WOULD FARE UNDER THE NEW REGIME. THEY HAVE
FOUND OUT NOW AND ARE LEAVING.

4. THE ETHINC BALANCE BETWEEN THE RULING MUSLIM MALAYS
AND THE ECONOMICALLY DOMINANT CHINESE IS A POLITICAL PROBLEM
HERE AND IT IS TRUE THAT THE GOM ONLY ENCOURAGES IMMIGRATION
BY MUSLIMS. THUS, THE ETHNIC ORIGINS OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES
MIGHT BE CITED BY GOM OFFICIALS IN GENERAL AS AN EXCUSE FOR
NOT REVIVING THEM. (IT HAS NEVER BEEN RAISED WITH US HERE.)
THE SALIENT FACTOR, THOUGH, WOULD BE THAT THE BOAT CASE
REFUGEES ARE ALL NON-USLIMS, NOT THAT MANY OF THEM ARE
CHINESE.

5. THE GOM POLICY OF REFUSING TO ACCEPT ANY BUT MUSLIM
REFUGEES FROM INDOCHINA DATES FROM SHORTLY AFTER THE FALL
OF SAIGON WHEN MOST ARRIVING REFUGEES WERE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE.
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IF GOM HAD ANNOUNCED A POLICY OF ACCEPTING INDOCHINESE
REFUGEES AT THAT TIME IT WOULD NOT ONLY HAVE OFFENDED
MUSLIMS BECAUSE IT WOULD INCREASE THE NON-MUSLIM, NON-MALAY
POPULATION BUT IT MIGHT ALSO HAVE FOCUSED ATTENTION ON
MALAYA-BORN CHINESE (ABOUT 250,000) AND INDIAN (ABOUT 50,000)
NON-CITIZEN PERMANENT RESIDENTS WHOSE APPLICATIONS FOR
CITIZENSHIP EITHER HAVE BEEN TURNED DOWN OR LEFT IN ABEYANCE
FOR YEARS. ANOTHER ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE IS THE MALAYSIAN

DETERMINATION NOT TO OFFEND THE HANOI GOVERNMENT WITH THICH
THEY HOPE TO DEVELOP A FREIENDLY RELATIONSHIP. FINALLY, THE
PRESENCE OF THE REFUGEES PUTS A BURDEN ON RESOURCES AND
POLICE MANPOWER AT A TIME WHEN THE POLICE ARE UNDERMANNED.

6. STILL AND ALL, DESPITE ITS OFFICIAL POLICY OF GIVING FOOD
AND FUEL TO BOAT REFUGEES AND SENDING THEM ON THEIR WAY,
MALAYSIA'S RECORD OF ACCEPTING OVER A THOUSAND CAMBODIANS
AND IN THE EVENT ALLOWING OVER TWO THOUSAND OTHER
INDOCHINESE TO REMAIN HERE INCOGNITO WHILE AWAITING
ACCEPTANCE BY THIRD COUNTRIES IS QUITE CREDITABLE WHEN
CAMPARED WITH HER SOUTHERN NEIGHBORS. FURTHERMORE,
OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE TREATMENT OF THE REFUGEES IS THAT
THEY ARE WELL CARED FOR BY ANY STANDARDS AND A GREAT DEAL
OF SYMPATHY IS SHOWN THEM BY OFFICIALS ON GROUND.

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